

Message Text

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72

ACTION ARA-17

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R 172146 Z MAY 73

FM AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1931

INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

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CINCLANT

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CINCLANT FOR POLAD

E. O. 11652: N/ A

TAGS: PINT, JM

SUBJ: JLP EXPOSES PNP EDUCATION PROGRAM

REF: A. KINGSTON 1622 B. KINGSTON 1569

1. SUMMARY: CHEARER CALLS NEW EDUCATION PROGRAM A SHAM AS MUCH OF THE PURPORTED " BREAKTHROUGH" IS ALREADY IN PLACE. ANNOUNCEMENT WAS PROBABLY AN EFFORT TO SAVE FACE AND WAS PROBABLY NOT WELL COORDINATED. END SUMMARY.

2. CONCLUDING A HEAVY DAY OF OPPOSITION ACTIVITY IN WHICH OPPOSITION FINANCE SPOKESMAN EDWARD SEAGA LET LOOSE HIS BOMBHELL AT A MEETING OF THE U. S. MEN' S LUNCHEON CLUB (REF A), THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION , HUGH SHEARER, ACCOMPANIED BY SEAGA AND FORMER MINISTER OF EDUCATION, EDWIN ALLEN, HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE TO OUTLINE THE OPPOSITION STAND ON THE DRAMATICALLY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ANNOUNCED NEW EDUCATION POLICY (REF B, PAR 7). IN HIS PREPARED STATEMENT, SHEARER FIRST CRITICIZED THE GOVERNMENT FOR NOT ABIDING BY THE INTER- PARTY AGREEMENT ON DEBATE PROCEDURE WHICH, ACCORDING TO SHEARER, PROVIDED FOR SEPARATE DEBATES ON FINANCIAL MATTERS, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL QUESTIONS, FOREIGN POLICY, ETC. SHEARER SAID THAT THE DECISION TO INTRODUCE THE EDUCATION PLAN AT THE END OF THE BUDGET DEBATE AND WITHOUT PROVIDING THE OPPOSITION WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO RESPOND WAS DUE TO THE FACT THAT THE INITIAL BUDGET PRESENTATION HAD FALLEN ON ITS FACE AND BEEN DEMOLISHED BY THE OPPOSITION. THAT THE EDUCATION PROPOSAL WAS A LAST- DITCH EFFORT TO SAVE FACE, WAS ACCORDING TO SHEARER, ILLUSTRATED BY THE FACT THAT IT WAS NOT MENTIONED IN THE THRONE SPEECH, NOR IN THAT OF THE MINISTER OF FINANCE. FURTHER, NO FUNDS WERE SPECIFICALLY PROVIDED IN THE DUBGET FOR THE PROGRAM.

3. THE STATEMENT WENT ON TO SAY THE THE PROPOSAL WHICH PURPORTED TO PROVIDE FREE EDUCATION TO SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS WAS A SHAM IN THAT ALREADY SOME 92 PERCENT OF THOSE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS WERE ATTENDING FREE OF CHARGE; PROVIDING FREE PLACES TO THE REMAINING 8 PERCENT COULD HARDLY BE DESCRIBED AS A DRAMATIC NEW BREAKTHROUGH, ALTHOUGH IT WAS CERTAINLY A LAUDABLE POLICY. THOSE WHO BENEFIT FROM THE PROPOSAL ARE ALREADY IN SCHOOL ANYWAY AND, PRESUMABLY, THEIR PARENTS ARE IN A POSITION TO PAY.

4. ON UNIVERSITY EDUCATION, SHEARER POINTED OUT THAT THE SAVING TO STUDENTS WOULD AMOUNT TO SOME \$65-\$135 PER YEAR, DEPENDING UPON THE FACULTY. WHEN THE TOTAL ANNUAL COST OF EDUCATION WAS RUNNING AT SOME \$1200, THE PROPOSAL COULD HARDLY BE DESCRIBED AS FREE EDUCATION.

5. SHEARER SAID THAT THE PURPOSE OF THE JLP PRESS CONFERENCE AND STATEMENT WAS NOT TO CRITICIZE THE CONCEPT OF FREE EDUCATION, BUT RATHER TO BRING TO THE ATTENTION OF THE COUNTRY THE FACT THAT THE GOVERNMENT' S PROPOSAL WAS NOT TO BE TAKEN AT FACE VALUE. THE NUMBERS OF STUDENTS IN THE SECONDARY SYSTEM WOULD NOT INCREASE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AND THE INCREASE OF GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE WOULD BE MARGINAL. THEREFORE, THERE WAS REALLY NO BREAKTHROUGH, MERELY AN EEXTENSION OF PRESENT POLICY.

6. SEAGA SKILLFULLY POINTED OUT THE FINANCIAL SHORTCOMINGS OF THE PROGRAM.

7. BEFORE A WILDLY ENTHUSIASTIC CROWD AT A MAJOR PNP RALLY LAST NIGHT THE PRIME MINISTER ANNOUNCED THAT THE EDUCATION PROGRAM WOULD BE EXPANDED TO INCLUDE THE COSTS AT BOARDING SCHOOLS. HE LAMBASTED THE OPPOSITION FOR DARING TO CRITICIZE HIS ATTEMPT " TO EDUCATE MY PEOPLE." (SEPTEL)

8. COMMENT: THE JLP HAS BEEN UNDER ATTACK FOR CRITICIZING WHAT, ON THE SURFACE AT LEAST, APPEAR TO THE RANK AND FILE JAMAICAN TO BE A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH. THE GOVERNMENT HAS NOT ELABORATED SUFFICIENTLY ON ITS NEW PROGRAM TO PERMIT DETAILED COMMENT, BUT ON THE BASIS OF WHAT IS PRESENTLY KNOWN, SHEARER MAY WELL BE RIGHT.

9. THE EMBASSY HAS LEARNED FROM OTHER SOURCES THE EDUCATION PROPOSAL WAS INDEED A LAST MINUTE EFFORT TO BOLSTER AN OTHERWISE LACK- LUSTER BUDGET PRESENTATION AND THAT FEW MEMBERS OF THE CABINET WERE AWARE OF IT BEFORE THE PRIME MINISTER' S SPEECH.
DE ROULET

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